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ABSTRACT

Research indicates Native American children view themselves more negatively than their Anglo counterparts and many self-concept enhancement techniques attempted with Indian pupils fail because they have been predicated on Anglo behavior patterns such as self-praise, teacher praise, popularity, and self-pride programs or competition, personal property, and verbalism, which are in direct conflict with the Indian value system of cooperation, shared property, and reticence. The paper consolidates relevant literature which deals with schooling and self-concept functioning of American Indian students and identifies independent variables and their effects which have been utilized on self-concept functioning. An educational/psychological model is proposed which calls for interface between student, teacher, and educational system and which allows Indian pupils to enhance their self-concepts by successfully interacting biculturally with Anglo and Indian societies. Finally, new directions are suggested for the school counselor to take in helping create and implement educational programs designed to facilitate positive self-concept development and maintenance of Native American pupils. Suggestions include: indepth counseling with the student; helping the student form appropriate self-comparison groups; placement of more than one Native American student in the classroom; and counselors who, if not Native American, understand the Native American culture thoroughly. (Author/AH)

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The Effects of Schooling on the Self-Concept of Native American Students

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Abstract

Almost all available data point to the conclusion that native American children view themselves more negatively than their Anglo counterparts. Unfortunately, many self-concept enhancement techniques attempted with Indian pupils have been predicated on Anglo behavior patterns and have been largely unsuccessful. The current paper reviews some of these self-concept enhancement techniques and assesses their effectiveness. An educational/psychological model is proposed which calls for interface between student, teacher, and educational system and which allows Indian pupils to enhance their self-concepts by successfully interacting biculturally with Anglo and Indian societies. Finally, suggestions are made as to how school counselors can aid in facilitating cultural interface and promote positive self-concept among native American children.

The Effects of Schooling on the Self-Concept of Native American Students

The need for cultural pluralism to replace monocultural approaches to education has long been recognized (Epps, 1974). Until recently, however, educational services have been provided to ethnically different children with little consideration given to the effects of the child's culture on learning and affective development. Rather than have the school system adapt to them, culturally different children have often been required to adapt their cultural values and knowledges to a monocultural curriculum and value system (Hickerson, 1966). Many times, this forced adaptation has resulted in poor academic performance and negative feelings about self and school on the part of minority children (Sando, 1974).

The issue of cultural adaptation is especially relevant to the educational problems faced by native American children. The educational history of American Indians is one of forced amalgamation of their cultural system into a monocultural educational framework. Thus, native American persons have been able to maintain their culture and values only under segregated and impoverished circumstances (Cockerman & Blevins, 1976). Unfortunately, due to low incidences of American Indians in the general population (approx. 400,000) and the relatively small number of school-aged Indian children living in nonrural geographic areas (approx. 10%), the educational and affective problems of native American students have been given less attention than problems of other minority groups (Youngman & Sadongei, 1974). This has often forced educators to adopt curriculum models and instructional techniques predicated on Anglo behavior patterns in attempts to raise feelings of self-worth in Indian pupils. Likewise, lack

of consolidation of relevant literature on self-concept functioning of Indian students has made findings difficult for educators to locate.

The present paper attempts to consolidate relevant literature which deals with schooling and self-concept functioning of American Indian students. It attempts to identify independent variables which have been utilized and the effects of those variables on self-concept functioning. Finally, it suggests new directions the school counselor may take in helping to create and implement educational programs designed to facilitate positive self-concept development and maintenance of native American pupils.

The Self-Concept: An Experential Construct

The self-concept has been defined as the sum total of how an individual views him/herself (Felker, 1974; Tolor & Blumin, 1977). It has been hypothesized that the self-concept is a "circular force" which influences both how experiences are perceived and whether new experiences will be attempted. Theorists (e.g., Festinger, 1957; Lecky, 1951) have suggested that the self-concept is an important component in maintaining belief consistency and reducing cognitive dissonance. Thus, the self-concept has been posited as a major mechanism in maintaining psychological equilibrium (Felker, 1974). It determines how experiences are to be interpreted and it provides sets of expectancies.

Self-concept has been correlated with a variety of educational and psychological variables. For example, self-concept has been shown to be positively related to school achievement in elementary school children (Purkey, 1970; Wattenburg & Clifford, 1964) and in school achievement with intermediate and secondary school pupils (Shaw & Alves, 1963; Williams & Cole, 1968). Academic success and positive self-concept have also been

shown to be positively correlated in Black and Hispanic children (Borovetz, 1975; Caplin, 1969; Gorlow, Butler, & Guthrie, 1963; Vasquez, 1974), in the mentally retarded (Meyers, 1976; Tolor, 1974), in physically handicapped children (Bryan, 1974; Safferstone, 1977), in the sensory impaired (Busby, Fillmer, & Smittle, 1974; Kennedy & Bruininks, 1976; McMaken, 1976; Schwartz, Ross, and Houchins, 1975), and in learning disabled pupils (Seaman, 1974; Sheare, 1978). Self-concept has been shown to be related to anxiety level (Coopersmith, 1959; Stanwyck & Felker, 1971), locus of control (Felker & Thomas, 1971; Messer, 1972), body build (Meissner & Thoreson, 1967; Richard & Emersons, 1970), and language development and usage (Felker & Thomas, 1971; Felker & Stanwyck, 1971; Marston, 1965). The robustness of the relationship between self-concept and schooling has led educators to become cognizant not only of the effects of schooling on cognitive functioning but also effects on affective development (Rogers, 1974; Williams & Cole, 1968). It is toward this goal of enhancing self-concept through schooling that the discussion of the self-concept of American Indian children ensues.

Self-Concept Functioning of Native American Students

Almost all available data point to the conclusion that American Indian children view themselves more negatively than their Anglo counterparts. This relationship has held within and between tribes, and across geographic areas. For example, in a study in which all school-age children of the Chippewa tribe residing on a Wisconsin reservation were tested (Rosenthal, 1970), it was found that from 73% to 89% of the children in various age groups demonstrated lower self-concepts than an Anglo control group. Likewise, Lefley (1974) found negative self-concept among two tribes residing in Florida, and Withycombe (1973), Taylor (1976), and Cockerman and Blevins

(1976), and Echohawk (1976) also reported lower self-concept among native American children residing in the Middle West.

There is also evidence to suggest that self-concept of native American children is negatively correlated with chronological age and years of schooling. For example, Wicker (1977) reported a relationship between racial identification, self-concept, and grade level. Wicker reported that although older native American children demonstrated more racial awareness than younger native American children, the measured self-concepts of the older children were lower than their younger counterparts. Likewise, Borovetz (1975) found that older native American pupils appeared to have lower estimates of how they believed their teachers felt about them than younger native American students. Furthermore, Borovetz found these beliefs to be correlated with reading achievement (which has been shown to be an important educational variable of of older students) and found that Indian students' perceptions of how teachers felt about them were lower than perceptions of Anglo, Black, and Hispanic students. This relationship between low self-concept in American Indian children as a function of academic achievement has also been reported by a variety of other experimenters (e.g., Chadwick et al., 1977; Cockerman & Blevins, 1976; Pike, 1976; Senor, 1973; Wicker, 1977).

The finding for diminished self-concept in native American students as a function of years of schooling holds implications for school counselors (Youngman & Sadongei, 1974). While one cannot conclude that the process of schooling caused the diminished self-concept, the correlation between the two variables suggests that the school counselor can take an active part in insuring that the school is a place where more success is experienced by the native American child. Additionally, when failure is experienced by the native American child, the school counselor who is versed in the tribal mores

and customs of the student may be able to work with the native American student in ways which will mitigate against the child internalizing failure in such a way that self-concept is negatively affected. Furthermore, since American Indian pupil self-concept is affected by how they believe their teachers feel about them, the school counselor is in an optimal position to help convince the student that academic school difficulty does not affect whether or not they are liked by their teachers. However, for this technique to be successful, the school counselor must also work with classroom teachers to guarantee that what the native American student believes about teachers' feelings for students being contingent on academic success is not an accurate phenomenon.

Attempts at Improving the Self-Concept of Native American Children: Teacher Techniques and Educational Programs

Techniques and programs successfully used in enhancing self-concept functioning of Anglo children have included initiating student self-praise, having teachers give praise, increasing student popularity with popular peers, and instituting self-pride programs (Felker, 1974; Felker, Stanwyck, & Kay, 1973; Glasser, 1973; Stanwyck, 1972). Unfortunately, these techniques and programs have been less successful when attempted with native American pupils. For example, Youngman and Sadongei (1974) studied the effects of self-praise techniques on American Indian children. The authors point out that in many native American cultures, it is considered ill mannered to speak of one's accomplishments. Praise is welcome if it is earned, but praise must come from someone else. Youngman and Sadongei reported that instructions to native American children to engage in self-praise led to cultural conflict between cultural norms and teacher demands. Faced with the conflict, it was found

that American Indian children instructed to praise themselves often lied to ridiculous measures about fictitious accomplishments. This finding holds implications for school counselors in that the counselor must make sure that the behaviors which the Anglo school system chooses to reinforce are not in conflict with the tribal and cultural norms of the native American student. Furthermore, in such cases where conflict does exist, the school counselor would need to be available to work with the native American pupils to discover ways to successfully reconcile such conflict. Finally, it is anticipated that the school counselor would function as an intermediary between the native American student's cultural norms and the norms of the Anglo school system in order to effectively diminish cultural conflict. Of course, success of the school counselor in the role of cultural-conflict intermediary would presuppose that the school counselor possess a strong knowledge of both the native American student's cultural demands and the covert demands of the Anglo school system.

Likewise, it has been reported that participating in a native American cultural awareness program has not generally proved successful in enhancing self-concept functioning of these children. For example, Taylor (1973) and Wicker (1977) found that after participating in an American Indian racial awareness program at school, the Indian children tested did not demonstrate significant self-concept gains. Likewise, Lefley (1974) investigated change in native American self-concept of a group of Miccosukee (Florida) Indians after a school initiated an American Indian cultural heritage program. Lefley found that, although the Indian children demonstrated an increased preference for Indian stimuli after completion of the program, these pupils' global self-concept remained basically unchanged. Lefley (1974) hypothesized that exposure to a native American cultural heritage educational program might

lead to a self-concept perception where the Indian student views him/herself as a "bad person but a good Indian." According to Lefley, cognitive dissonance created by the cultural heritage program would be resolved by the American Indian students viewing themselves as "still bad, but better than we thought we were." Lefley's hypothesis has been partially supported by Cockerman and Blevins (1976), who suggested that the social world in which the American Indian student feels most comfortable is one of "Indianness" and poverty and that contact with Anglo teachers, even reinforcing Anglo teachers, leads to self-doubt and decrements in self-concept.

Like self-praise, teacher praise, and cultural heritage programs, it has been reported that increasing the American Indian child's general popularity with Anglo schoolmates has not proven particularly effective in enhancing self-concept of Indian school children. For example, Withycombe (1973) investigated the relationship between self-concept, social status, and perceived social status of Anglo and Paiute Indian children. Withycombe found that, for the Anglo children, social status and perceived social status were related to self-concept. However, for the American Indian children tested, self-concept was not related to perceived social status with Anglo peers. Withycombe concluded that popularity was of little concern to Paiute children and hypothesized that Anglo children were more sensitive to clues of acceptance or lack of acceptance by popular peers than Paiute children. Likewise, Chadwick, Bahr, and Strauss (1977), using a multivariate, stepwise regression analysis, found that the weakest predictor for improving academic achievement and self-concept in native American students was changing Indian peer friendship patterns. Furthermore, the data suggested a negative relationship between self-concept, peer popularity, and achievement for American Indian students. According to Lefley (1974), this negative relationship between

self-concept and Anglo popularity for American Indian students may be caused by cognitive dissonance created when the pupil views him/herself as popular in the white world but nevertheless a disloyal Indian. It may be that the belief that increasing the native American student's popularity with students of the dominant culture increases the American Indian child's self-concept is based on Anglo ethnocentrism.

The finding that placing native American students in classes with Anglo pupils does not necessarily facilitate the Indian pupil's self-concept and may, in fact, have a negative effect on that student's self-concept functioning puts the school system and the school counselor in a difficult position. Current educational practice has called for the mainstreaming of students and recent legislation has mandated against segregation of students in school along cultural, social, or racial lines (MacMillan, 1977; Mercer, 1973, 1974). These educational laws have mandated that students from diverse cultures such as native American and Anglo shall be mixed in heterogeneous classes. However, the success of such heterogeneous grouping or mainstreaming has most often been judged on cognitive rather than affective grounds, and the effects of mainstreaming on such variables as self-concept only recently have become topics of investigation (Luftig, in press). As has been indicated, however, it may be that such mainstreaming is not facilitative of positive self-concept functioning of minority and handicapped students (Chadwick et al., 1977; Lefley, 1974; Luftig, in press; Withycombe, 1973). Nevertheless, school systems have no choice. They must integrate their classrooms as mandated by law.

The possible diminished self-concept by native American students in heterogeneous classrooms is a problem which is within the purview of the school counselor. It often will fall to the school counselor to work with the

native American student to relieve feelings of frustration and anxiety during the student's attempt to succeed in an Anglo school environment. In-depth counseling will need to be carried out with the pupil if the student is to feel comfortable in a non-Indian educational environment. Another technique which has been found to be successful with minority students in heterogeneous classes is that of helping them form appropriate self-comparison groups (Boersma, 1979; Brookover, Erickson, & Joiner, 1967; Luftig, in press; Strang, Smith, & Rogers, 1978). It was found, for example, that when handicapped students compared themselves with other handicapped students in the heterogeneous class rather than comparing themselves with everyone else in the class, self-concept was maintained. Thus, in cases where native American children are placed in heterogeneous, Anglo classes, the school counselor may be of value in encouraging the American Indian student to compare him/herself with Indian classmates rather than with the entire heterogeneous class group. Additionally, it would appear that situations where only one native American student is placed in a class of Anglo students should be avoided whenever possible.

Educational Directions for Improving Self-Concepts of Indian Students: Suggestions and Implications

It is evident that educational techniques and programs used with American Indian students in order to enhance self-concept have not always proved successful. What then can be done to improve self-concept functioning in these individuals? Gay (1978) has suggested that educational effectiveness occurs when teachers are well informed about cultural differences between student and school, and when teachers are skilled in techniques of cross-cultural communication. Thus, Gay asserts that just as the self-concept is the lens

through which experience is interpreted, the native American child's cultural orientation is the lens through which the self-concept is focused and developed. Gay has argued that in order to understand the ethnically different child, one must be knowledgeable of the child's cultural value system and communication pattern. As Youngman and Sadongei (1974) point out, when the American Indian culture reinforces cooperation, shared property, and reticence, and when the dominant culture conversely rewards competition, personal property, and verbalization, schooling is apt to have a negative effect on self-concept functioning of native American children.

Pfeiffer (1969) has hypothesized that educational attempts to improve self-concept functioning of American Indian students have been largely unsuccessful because they have not prepared native Americans to interact cross-culturally with Anglo society. According to Pfeiffer, native Americans may make one of five choices in dealing with the dominant culture. They may reject the dominant culture, reject the tribal culture, reject both cultures, remain anxiously suspended between both cultures, or participate easily in both cultures. Pfeiffer asserts that only the last choice does not produce anxiety for the American Indian individual and only by successfully interacting in both cultures can self-concept of American Indian students be enhanced. Thus, investigators into native American students' self-concept functioning (e.g., Hickerson, 1966; Lefley, 1974, 1975; Pepper, 1976; Sando, 1974) have called for a bicultural educational system which would provide native American children with numerous and diverse opportunities to successfully interact with both cultures. According to Gay (1978), investigators into facilitative educational environments for culturally different students reveal that successful programs are those where the culture of the student, the culture of the teacher, and the norms of the school environment successfully interface

rather than work at cross purposes with one another. Thus, according to Gay, self-concept functioning in native American and other culturally different student populations will improve when teachers and school environments become truly pluralistic.

Sando (1974) has suggested that Indian educational systems which segregate Indian pupils or which are integrated but which relegate Indians to second-class status do not qualify as a pluralistic system and do the Indian pupil a grave injustice. Sando asserts that even in cases where a segregated system reinforces and build up "Indianness," the system only solidifies Indian nonadaptive bicultural behavior and insures Indian social withdrawal from the Anglo culture. Rather, available data suggest that the more an educational system allows American Indian students to develop adequate bicultural modes of interaction, the greater the facilitative effect on self-concept of Indian pupils. Thus, Cockerman and Blevins (1976) found that a culturally integrated, open, bicultural school setting led to greater self-concept gains by Indian students than any other system investigated.

How might the school counselor facilitate adequate bicultural interactions between Anglo and native American pupils? First, it is imperative that the school counselor become thoroughly acquainted with the native American student's culture. Lefley (1975) has shown that American Indians interact better with professionals who are native American themselves and who speak the American Indian tribal language. While most school counselors are not native Americans, school counselors can nevertheless familiarize themselves with tribal norms, beliefs, and cultural values. Youngman and Sadongei (1974) have shown that even the most well-meaning of Anglo educators can violate tribal cultural norms in their everyday dealings with native American children. Thus, it is imperative that the school counselor have a strong

working knowledge of the native American tribal culture so as not to inadvertently violate cultural norms, lose face in the eyes of the American Indian student, and inadvertently place American Indian pupils in culturally compromising situations.

Secondly, it would appear advisable that the school counselor oversee the native American's educational program so as to minimize "Anglo-Indian" and "Indian-Indian" competition. It has been demonstrated that the native American culture is one which reinforces cooperation and shared property, while the Anglo culture reinforces property rights and interpersonal competition. Since the school counselor is in the position to oversee the educational programs of children, the counselor can work with teachers in evaluating educational programs in terms of degree of competition built into the programs. The counselor should attempt to encourage cooperative structures in classrooms with native American children rather than competitive structures. Conversely, the school counselor will need to work with native American students in order to facilitate the students' appropriate handling of educationally competitive situations in the heterogeneous classroom.

One valuable attribute in the American Indian culture is reticence (Youngman & Sadongei, 1974). However, it has been demonstrated that the Anglo school system is one based on the ability to verbalize and handle verbal materials (Cronbach, 1975). Such reticence on the part of native American students may have two negative implications in the Anglo educational world. First, it may give the impression to the Anglo teacher that the native American student is unknowledgeable in school matters, or worse, that the student possesses a "bad attitude" about school. Such inferences on the part of the Anglo teacher would presumably negatively affect Anglo teacher-native American student interactions and inhibit self-concept functioning on the

part of the student. Secondly, such reticence on the part of the native American student will inhibit dialogue between the student and the school counselor. This puts the counselor in a difficult position since any effective counseling is predicated upon meaningful dialogue between counselor and student. In such cases of native American student reticence, the school counselor must tactfully and systematically encourage the student to verbalize his/her feelings about school and self while not putting undue pressure on the student to speak in critical ways which might be interpreted in the tribe as a sign of disrespect or haughtiness. Again, in such cases, a strong knowledge of the tribal cultural norms by the school counselor will be of great value so as not to lose credibility with the native Indian pupil.

In summary, it is becoming increasingly apparent that culture conflicts in expectations, attitudes, and behaviors between American Indian students, Anglo teachers, and the dominant society's educational norms can adversely affect the self-concepts of American Indian students. If schooling is to have a facilitative effect on native American self-concept, more effort must be placed on creating a bicultural interface between teacher, student, and school. What appears to be needed are educational experiences which will allow the native American child opportunities to move successfully between cultures. Teaching American Indian students behaviors which allow them to interact easily, naturally, and nonanxiously between cultures may be the greatest self-concept boost that educators can give to American Indian children. In such a system, the school counselor can make a significant contribution in relieving the tensions between the two cultures and acting as an intermediary in resolving conflicts and misunderstandings between American Indian students, Anglo teachers, and the norms of the dominant society's educational system.

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